

Determination Leads to Wisdom

In the ABCs of Wisdom, D is for determination. Continuing even when things get tough is determination. Wisdom doesn't come easily. It comes over time when you are determined.

It is easy to give up. It is easy to procrastinate. It is easy to quit.

When I found myself divorced with three young children I was devastated. After a long while my determination kicked in.

I taught school for a few years and realized my salary would not increase significantly unless I had a master's degree. When my children were nine, seven, and six years old, I made the decision to return to college.

The process was not all smooth travels. For acceptance into graduate school, I had to jump several hurdles. I didn't quite make the cut to test out for automatic admission to the graduate school at The University of Texas at Austin. This meant I'd have to gather letters of recommendation, transcripts, fill out more forms, and meet with the dean in order to be accepted on probation. Swallowing my pride did not go down easily.

I could have given up at that point. I could've said, "Maybe this isn't meant to be." Instead I drove to Austin and had a brief meeting with the dean as a formality. He nodded, signed a paper, and I was accepted. It was my first inkling that *determination*, not great skill, is a big part of reaching a goal.

I still would have to make arrangements for the care of three children while I was in class. Most openings in the nice childcare centers were not available just for the summer. I was told, "Parents pay for spots to hold them even if they aren't using them in the summer."

The University had an office for "returning students" that gave me a list of 100 childcare centers in Austin. They had everything from tiny home-based centers to huge kid zoos. I wasn't having any luck finding an acceptable place until the day I visited St. Martin's Lutheran.

The elderly director gave me a VIP tour. Then she asked, "May I sign up your children?" Stunned I asked, "You know I have *three* children?" She said she did and I was able to enroll all three in one of the highest quality day cares in Austin.

The last piece in the puzzle was housing. It was too late to qualify for university housing. Time was running out. The deadline for getting the down payments for tuition and childcare was quickly approaching. Shortly before the last week to back out my old friend who lived in Austin called, "I've found an apartment that you can sublet. It is in a complex in the Clarksville area. You can lease it for the summer."

Even with the pieces coming together I didn't know how I would manage this major undertaking and all the changes for the kids. But I was determined.

The shuttle bus system ran like a spider-web across the city with stops all over the university campus. Imagine my surprise when I learned the bus stopped at the corner near our apartment and drove directly to the corner of St. Martin's Lutheran. A bus from the daycare center stopped in front of the education building where all my classes took place. This was truly amazing considering the 437-acre campus of The University of Texas.

The odds of my figuring all that out and making it happen in my own power were slim, but divine synchronicities prepared the way for me. After three summers on our final trek home my children put a poster on the back of our station wagon: "Hurray, hurray. We're happy as can be. Mom finally finished at UT."

Since then I have seen many women achieve hard goals. Even simple tasks require determination. Whatever your goal *determination* is the key-determination that leads to wisdom.

Gail Cawley Showalter, Director
Educational Support Program for Bridges of Hope